

Provençal Butterflies in April 1978

By DR. C. J. LUCKENS *

The snow and sleet which greeted us soon after we drove off the ferry at Le Havre and the bitter east wind which persisted right through to Provence did not make an encouraging start to our late April family holiday. Added to that was the increasing malaise of our motorcaravan which developed more and more ailments during our marathon 17-hour journey south. The warm, aromatic Mediterranean breeze was a wonderful tonic, however, as we drove in the darkness through the fringe of the Massif des Maures, and we finally arrived at our rented gîte a few kilometres outside Ste. Maxime, in the early hours of the morning.

A few hours sleep, a late breakfast on the sun-filled balcony, and the sight of a large *Iphiclides podalirius* L. flapping across the yard below, quickly restored morale, and I lost no time in taking the three boys for a walk along the narrow roads behind Guerrevieille. The dominant butterflies were *Euchloe crameri* Butler and *Pieris napi* L., but there were also a few *Anthocaris cardamines* L. and *Gonepteryx cleopatra* L. In a small hollow beside the road I netted a female *Pararge aegeria aegeria* L., but not all subsequent captures were of the typical orange form of this butterfly, and pale specimens very similar to *aegerides* also turned up from time to time. Beside the house *Celestrina argiolus* L. flitted around the flowering *prunus* trees.

The next day was spent mainly arranging for repairs to our car and hiring a replacement, but I did have a short time to explore the lower Couloubrier valley north of Ste. Maxime. *E. crameri* was again widespread and the only new species were *Erynnis tages* L. and *Callophrys rubi* L.

Two hopelessly wet days followed, but April 19th promised fair and we took the narrow hill road beyond Grimaud to Collobrières. As we neared Collobrières the first *Anthocaris belia euphenoides* Staud. appeared, fluttering over the yellow *biscutella* flowers beside the road. We eventually found a place to stop beside an orchard, and among some rough ground nearby single specimens of *Heodes tityrus* Poda and *Clossiana dia* L. turned up. A *Nymphalis polychloros* L. was seen feeding high up on a flowering cherry but flew off before I could net it. Just before leaving I caught a fresh female *Colias croceus* Geoff. which, over the next few days obliged with a number of ova. We left by the winding road over the Col de Babaou, stopping half way up to intercept a large female *Papilio machaon* L. which was fluttering over pink cistus, and which also produced a large batch of ova before her release three days later.

Thundery showers prevailed for two days, but the 22nd was hot and sunny and my second son came with me to explore the eastern edge of the Forêt de Dom beyond Cogolin. In

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rough ground by a stream Colin spotted a worn female *Zerynthia polyxena* D. & S., a butterfly I particularly wanted to find. This prompted a more extensive search and after crossing the stream we eventually found ourselves in a lush meadow where this attractive butterfly was flying in numbers. The rich herbage harboured clumps of *Aristolochia rotunda* the main foodplant of *polyxena* and also several examples of the lovely yellow Southern tulip. On the far side of the meadow the fringe of the forêt domaniale clothed a gently rising slope, and in the centre was an overgrown vineyard with several flowering fruit trees. The blossom was attracting *podalirius* and a few *Nymphalids* such as *Polygonia c-album* L., *Nymphalis io* L. and another wary *polychloros*. Just before leaving I casually searched one of the clumps of *Aristolochia* and almost immediately found two *polyxena* ova.

April 23rd was the warmest day of our holiday. In the morning Colin and I went to the terraces east of Draguignan where Mr. R. F. Bretherton had done some profitable collecting in 1962. Times had changed however, and there was a plethora of notices alongside the road stating 'Propriété Privée. Défense d'Entrer' or more simply and perhaps more tellingly 'Attention. Chien Méchant'! We found one fairly good area however where several *A. belia euphenoides* were fluttering about like lemon-yellow flower petals, and Colin captured a single male *Philotes baton* Berg. in perfect condition. We also saw *C. dia*, *G. cleopatra*, *Leptidea sinapis* L. and *Pyrgus malvae* L. I was pleased to net a female *Libthea celtis* Laich., but to my chagrin failed to find any *Celtis australis* to sleeve her on.

In the afternoon we all went to the meadow west of Cogolin where *polyxena*, *crameri*, *croceus* and several more *podalirius* were flying. New species seen were *Spialia sertorius* Hoffmann. and *Aricia agestis* D. & S. Searching clumps of plantain, I found two *Melitaea* larvae which, bred out in May, produced large fine specimens of *Melitaea didyma* Esp.

Collecting was impossible for the next three days but on April 27th, our last full day at Guerrevieille the sun shone once more and my two older sons came with me to the disused railway line which runs along the coast east of Le Rayol. The track was bordered by Arbutus bushes in several places, but we searched in vain for larvae of *Charaxes jasius* L. The bright, orange-dappled form of *P. aegeria* was fairly common and I was also pleased to find *Pieris mannii* Mayer.

The following day we started north for home without a starter motor, which had broken with a horrifying noise the evening before. A veil must be drawn over the next two days, but suffice it to say we did not stall at any really inconvenient times and when we were finally pushed off the ferry at Portsmouth, a satisfying harvest of specimens and livestock made all the tribulations of the journey seem worthwhile.

References

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THE LARVA OF *EILEMA PYGMAEOLA PYGMAEOLA* (THE PIGMY FOOTMAN). — During a field meeting of the Canterbury branch of the Kent Trust for Nature Conservation at Sandwich Bay on the 11th June 1978, I found by a footpath on the Royal St. George's Golf Course, a large concrete bollard which I turned over in the hope of finding some beetles. On the side of this lichen-encrusted piece of concrete I found two Arctiid larvae. One of these furry brown caterpillars was evidently parasitised and unfortunately both host and parasite died. However, the other larva soon spun a cocoon from which there emerged a perfect specimen of *Eilema pygmaeola pygmaeola* Doubleday. This specimen was shown at the Annual Exhibition of the British Entomological and Natural History Society, where Mr. Chalmers-Hunt informed me that little or nothing appears to be known of the immature stages of this insect, at least in this country. Being unaware of the significance of my capture at the time, I made no description of the full grown larva and its cocoon. However, as it seems likely that the two larvae were feeding on the lichen on the concrete bollard it should be possible to find more in 1979.— L. D. M. PACKER, 1 Mary Green Walk, Canterbury, Kent.

[This is the first time to my knowledge that the larva of this species has been found in Britain, despite the fact that the moth has been known as an inhabitant of this country for more than 130 years, and is not uncommon where it occurs.— J.M.C.H.]

THE PAINTED LADY IN DECEMBER 1978.— I was interested to see a *Cynthia cardui* L. here in our garden on 4th December, a beautiful calm sunny day after a cold spell. It settled on Chrysanthemum and Senecio.— T. G. HOWARTH, Highview, 4 Clinton Road, Beer, Seaton, Devon.

EPIPHYAS POSTVITTANA WALKER IN HAMPSHIRE. — I recorded the second and third appearance of this species in Hampshire last year (in *Ent. Rec.*, 90: 82). This year's records strengthen the likelihood that it is now breeding in the Winchester area of Hampshire. I took two specimens in my Winchester (V.c.11) m.v.t rap on nights 25th/26th October and 1st/2nd November 1978. In addition Rev. S. C. Pittis brought me a further specimen that had come to a 15 watt actinic trap in his garden on nights 27th/28th October. This also in V.c.11 about a mile away from mine towards the centre of Winchester (V.c.11) m.v. trap on nights 25th/26th October and Lane, Winchester, Hants., SO22 5LF.